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Annotation #2  
Film Title: Food, Inc.  
Word Count: 1672

**Title, director and release year?**

Food, Inc. is a documentary directed by Robert Kenner, first shown in February of 2009, and later commercially opened in June of 2009.

**What is the central argument or narrative of the film?**

Food, Inc. deals with the increasing industrialization and commercialization of the agriculture and food production industries, mainly in the United States. Topics dealt with include the outbreak of diseases such as E. Coli and salmonella, the abuse of illegal migrant workers, and the ongoing legal onslaught between large corporations and smaller farmers.

**How is the argument or narrative made and sustained? How much scientific information is provided, for example? Does the film have emotional appeal?**

The entirety of Food, Inc.'s argument is composed of interviews, mostly first hand, with the victims of the commercialization of the food production industries. These interviewees range from farmers to union organizers to consumers. These interviews are then arranged in such a manner that the director attacks the food production industry from a variety of angles. Additionally, it should be noted that there is very little counter argument from the large corporations, either due to the director's intentional choice or to corporation's decision not to provide material.

The greatest weakness noticed with the argument composed in the film is the lack of quantifiable data. As mentioned, most of the content comprising the narrative of the film is personal opinion. While this is a powerful tool in arguments, it's generally much stronger when supported by numerical data. This isn't to suggest that the director ignored the numbers to create an inaccurate representation of the situation, but rather that the numerical data would be difficult to attain, and what it would add to the film would not be worth the cost of collecting it. Thus, due to a lack of quantifiable argument points, the film does rely heavily on emotional appeal. The end goal of the director was to create a call to arms to the audience, as evidenced by the final portion of the film that details how to get involved with the problem. Several scenes, such as the interview with the woman championing Kevin's Law discussing how she lost her son to E. Coli, or the hidden camera footage of the atrocities of a meat production factory, are strategically used to attack the viewer's emotions, and give them extra incentive to be involved.

**What sustainability problems does the film draw out? (Political, Legal, Economic, Technological, Media and informational, Organizational, Educational, Behavioral, Cultural, Ecological?)**

The most glaring sustainability problem pointed out in the film is the direction of the food production industry and what that means for the people of the world. Firstly, the large scale production was shown to create an unsanitary production facility, which in turn created a variety of health problems and worries for all consumers, from meat to vegetables. Secondly, the

demand for mass food at low costs has created a demand for cheap and fast labor. This in turn creates horrible work conditions, human rights violations, and destroys the concept of smaller, local farmers and food producers. Lastly, and possibly most importantly, the oversight committees of the government, such as the FDA and EPA, are becoming increasingly more lenient in their standards, largely due to the financial connections large corporations have with these departments. The film's clinching point comes from repeated warning that the future looks exponentially bleaker than the present, and that if immediate action is not taken, drastic consequences could permanently affect the progress of mankind.

### **What parts of the film did you find most persuasive and compelling? Why?**

As explained, the director relies heavily on emotions of the audience in making his argument. This includes many scenes of animal abuse and human rights violations. However, the most powerful scene in my opinion was the segment that focused on the corporate bullying of farmers due to seed patents. At one point, the director included a large portion of a deposition of a small time farmer who is basically being forced into accusing his compatriots and long time friends in the industry. Many other farmers are interviewed as well, some who could not even show their face in fear of another lawsuit. This was the most uninspiring point of the movie, as you could see a large bunch of strong, independent farmers clearly very worried for their financial well-being, sometimes for no reason. The clinching detail was that not a single farmer or lawsuit discussed had a positive outcome; in most cases, they were financially strangled until they settled with the large corporation. In essence, the director showed how large food producing corporations are systematically demolishing the American ideal of making your own living with your own hands. Now, the best these farmers can hope for is they don't face a lawsuit from a large corporation.

### **What parts of the film were you not compelled or convinced by? Why?**

One portion of the film followed Gary Hirshberg, the creator, president, and CEO of Stonyfield Farm. In this portion, Mr. Hirshberg makes a deal with Wal-Mart to supply them with organic products at a reasonable price (as it is Wal-Mart). However, this portion is strongly hurt by the lack of quantifiable data as mentioned before. The audience is thrown into this company, Stonyfield Farms, which apparently creates organic products in healthy environments, and yet is still able to compete with other mass food production companies to the point that they're making deals with one of the largest suppliers in the world in Wal-Mart. Now, as nice and honest as Mr. Hirshberg appears on the screen, very little is explained about his company. How exactly is it that they are able to compete with these production giants and still maintain their integrity? Now it isn't that I flat out don't believe this portion of the film, but its much harder for me to take everything told to me as gospel when it's so unbelievable.

### **What audiences does the film best address? Why?**

The primary goal of the film is to inspire action in the audience. Therefore, the best kind of audience would be one that has money and time available to give to a cause. Immediately, that means that the middle to upper class are targeted. The next goal of the film is to inspire nutritional change in the audience. Once again, this means that the audience has to be willing to change their diet and have the monetary resources to do so. Other than that, the film does well in not discriminating against anyone in particular, so the ideal audience for the film would be one with time, money, vigor, and the willingness to change the world.

**What could have been added to this film to enhance its environmental educational value?**

The majority of the film dealt with the financial, agricultural, and social impacts created by the industrialization of the food production industries. In fact, environmental impacts were mostly considered a secondary concern in the long run. There are several mentions within the film of how continued progress down the current path will destroy the earth, but specific details are sparse. There's no real mention in how the mass slaughter of farm animals affects the population of these animals, or how it affects the earth that is used to pen these animals, or how the runoff from their manure has an effect on the earth beyond how it affects other food. There's no mention either of how genetically modified crops are affecting the soil that is used to grow these crops, or how the local ecosystem and wildlife is largely affected by GMO's, or how runoff from these crops affects the water. Additionally, there's no mention of how the mass production facilities are polluting the air, or how unhealthy the transportation of workers from low income areas is for the atmosphere, or how the runoff of chemicals to 'cleanse' the final products are affecting local water sources. Frankly, all of these would be great to add to the film, but they would be distracting from the ultimate goal of the director. He never intended this documentary to be a comment on the environment, he only used it in his arguments when it was convenient to.

**What kinds of actions and points of intervention are suggested by the film? If the film itself does not suggest corrective action, describe actions that you can imagine being effective.**

The last portion of the film deals entirely with what can be done to change. The director makes sure to include several direct quotes stating that the power of change lies with the individual consumers. Individuals are encouraged to, when they can, buy organic or locally grown foods. Additionally, individuals are encouraged to voice their support for legislation such as Kevin's Law, while voicing their concern with the shortcomings of oversight departments like the FDA and EPA. Unfortunately, in the long run, one individual will not make much difference. If there is to be any change in the current direction, it relies on a mass movement of people, a large enough movement that requires more than one award-winning documentary. While it's important to alert the public of the atrocities being committed, any change demands much more public outcry.

**What additional information has the film compelled you to seek out? (Provide at least two supporting references.)**

I decided to look into Monsanto Corporation, the big evil corporation bullying individual farmers, beyond just what I'd already known. Monsanto originally started out producing many other products than genetically modified seeds. In fact, a product they created was featured in Disneyland in the 60's. It was only recently that Monsanto decided to invest in genetically modified seeds. Indeed, the GMO's forced farmers to purchase new seeds each year, and the legal bullying from Monsanto is entirely unethical. However, the reputation they've received seems to be mostly a product of public fear of GMO's, due to their connection in the media to problems such as Mad Cow Disease. The reputation for being an evil corporation, it seems, comes more from supposedly trying to poison the world than from bullying the little guys.

Additionally, I decided to look into the Stonyfields Farms organic producer that was covered, ever so loosely, within the film. An article from 2006 gives a more indepth look into the company, and from what is reported, it sounds like the company is legitimate, albeit dying. The organic industry is, as assumed, incredibly difficult to succeed in. Sacrifices are made in the name of creating revenue, but it seems that Mr. Hirshberg does draw the line at sacrificing the integrity of his company. While he may have to ship organically produced milk from Australia instead of getting it from nearby in order to grow his company, he keeps to his original goal of creating organic, sustainable food.

**Resources:**

- <http://modernfarmer.com/2014/03/monsantos-good-bad-pr-problem/>
- <http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2006-10-15/the-organic-myth>